



## Circuit Worship: Advent 4 20<sup>th</sup> December 2020 offered by Rev'd Lesley Dinham

### Call to Worship

God chose a home,  
not of steel, or brick, or glass, or magnificence,  
but a body, of flesh, of blood, of breath,  
with consent, with courtesy, with courage.  
Come, let us worship our incarnate God  
born among us, and always with us. **Amen.**

As we come to Advent 4, we light our candle in the theme of love. Today's candle might be pink because today we think of Mary and her obedience to the call of God on her life. Of course, the prophets knew long ago that the Messiah would come so let's sing about that now as we come before our God in Worship.

### Hymn: 'Long ago, Prophets knew' (StF:178)

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

1. Long ago, prophets knew,  
Christ would come, born a Jew,  
Come to make all things new;  
bear the people's burden,  
freely love and pardon.  
*Ring bells ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing choirs sing, sing, sing!*  
*When he comes, when he comes,*  
*who will make him welcome.*
2. God in time, God in man,  
this is God's timeless plan;  
he will come, as a man,  
born himself of woman,  
God divinely human.  
*Ring bells ring, ring, ring...*
3. Mary, hail! Though afraid,  
she believed, she obeyed.  
In her womb, God is laid;  
till the time expected,  
nurtured and protected.  
*Ring bells ring, ring, ring....*
4. Journey end! Where afar  
Bethlem shines, like a star,  
Stable door stands ajar.  
Unborn Son of Mary,  
Saviour do not tarry!  
*Ring bells ring, ring, ring!*  
*Sing choirs sing, sing, sing!*  
*Jesus comes! Jesus comes!*  
*We will make him welcome!*

### Let us pray:

Loving God, we praise you this day with all our heart and with all our lives. We give you thanks for the blessings we receive each and every day and in response we Worship you our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Father and Mother God who strengthens, sustains, raises up, redeems, births, brings, gathers and celebrates; God whose love is bigger than the skies, firmer than the earth's foundations, wider than the world's oceans; You who reveals your story and your goodness to us through life and faith, courage and witness; help us dear Lord to do likewise and more in your strength and in so doing, bring all glory, praise and thanksgiving to you.

Merciful and gracious God, today, days before we celebrate your self-giving in human form, we turn to you knowing how often we fall short in life, in conversation, in generosity and in courage. Forgive us, for not listening as Mary did; and not trusting as Joseph did; Help us each and every day to become more like you, not because it will make you love us more, but because it's for our sake, and for the sake of the people you love so much. Come, Jesus our Saviour come, wash us white as snow so that we can celebrate your coming with a pure heart and clean hands. **Amen.**

## The Birth of Jesus Foretold

Today we will be exploring the message of Christmas through Mary, Jesus' mother, the woman who gave birth and took care of the Saviour of the world, God in human flesh; Grace coming down at Christmas.

**Reading:**                    **Luke 1:26-38**

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.' <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

**Hymn:**                    **'The Angel Gabriel from Heaven came...' (StF:187)**

Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1.     The Angel Gabriel from Heaven came<br/>      his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as<br/>      flame;<br/>      'All hail', said he, 'thou lowly maiden<br/>      Mary,<br/>      most highly favoured lady' Gloria!</p> <p>2.     'For known a blessed Mother thou shalt<br/>      be,<br/>      all generations laud and honour thee,<br/>      thy son shall be Immanuel, by seers<br/>      foretold;<br/>      most highly favoured lady' Gloria!</p> | <p>3.     Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her<br/>      head,<br/>      'To me be as it pleaseth God,' she said,<br/>      'My soul shall laud and magnify his holy<br/>      name:'<br/>      most highly favoured lady' Gloria!</p> <p>4.     Of her, Immanuel, the Christ was born<br/>      in Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,<br/>      and Christian folk throughout the world<br/>      will ever say,<br/>      'Most highly favoured lady' Gloria!</p> |
|---|---|

**Reflection:**            **God's Plan**

There are times, I'm sure, in the life of every person, when God, if we're listening, reveals God's-self and asks that we do something. This is a special God moment. Have you had that moment in your life when God has changed something ordinary into something extraordinary? What I want to say you to today is: Don't miss your moment with God.

Let's look at Mary. Put yourself in her shoes. Imagine what it must have been like to be a young teenage girl living in a culture where women had no voice, and where being unmarried and pregnant was a crime punishable by death. All the odds were against her, and yet she said YES to God.

Her encounter had characteristics that I believe can teach us about God moments:

- They are initiated by God, not us. The God moments are unanticipated. Mary didn't ask for the experience she received and was totally surprised by it.
- It was a great privilege for Mary to be chosen for this task. It's a privilege any time God chooses us to help fulfil the divine purpose.
- Our encounters with God may not include angels, but that doesn't make them any less supernatural. They require us to say yes. When God invites us into what God is doing, we're given the chance to partner the Holy Spirit. But we need to be willing to say yes and when we do, the experience will not only change our lives, but the lives of others.
- God moments can overwhelm us; they definitely disrupt our lives and they can make us uncomfortable. But, whenever we're willing to trust God and say yes, our lives take on new meaning and direction and would you want to miss that?

I wonder what Mary's life would've been like if she'd said no to God instead of saying: **'I am the servant girl of the Lord. Let this happen to me as you say!'** Would Jesus have been born to another young woman in Nazareth? Would He still have been a carpenter? Would Mary have still recognized that Jesus was the Son of God? There's no way to know. But, what can we learn from this?

I think, these days, we're at a bit of a disadvantage because we live in a time when people misunderstand God and what God desires for His people. We were created to be extraordinary. We are God's instruments of impossibility. Scripture tells us that what might be impossible for us, is possible with God because everything is possible with God. Miracles do happen. Knowing that should change our approach to every year, every day, every minute that we live.

If you want God to do the impossible in your life, you cannot allow fear to cloud your view of God and what God can do. Our hope must outweigh our questions. Our trust must be greater than our doubt. When God invites us to do something, don't try to work out how God will fulfil the divine purpose; the solution is God's problem. Besides, God loves to surprise us. God is creative. God does things we can't imagine in our wildest dreams. Say yes, and then watch how everything comes together.

We'll never regret saying yes to God. It's a fact, when God gives an opportunity to say yes, we can see all the reasons to say no and all those negative ideas can be overwhelming. But we need to understand that there are more reasons to say yes than to say no, even if we can't see them at the time. Only after we say yes, are we able to see.

What we need to do is to stay connected to God.

Mary was a candidate for God's blessing because she was close to God as she raised Jesus and throughout her life. Another thing is that Mary wasn't passive as she cared for Jesus. Luke says that when extraordinary things happened, Mary treasured them in her heart and pondered them. No matter how much or how little talent God has given you, you cannot go wrong by staying connected to God.

What you also need to do is to stay connected to your purpose

From the time before Jesus was even conceived, Mary knew her purpose. It was her purpose to bear, raise, nurture, and care for the Son of God. Raising any child isn't easy. Having responsibility for Jesus must have weighed upon Mary heavily. But she bore it with grace, and was faithful to the end. When you have doubts, face difficulties, or need to make tough decisions, don't depart from your purpose. If you know why God has put you on earth, use that knowledge as a standard. If you don't know your purpose, ask God to reveal it.

What we also need to do is to stay connected to those who encourage us

Soon after Mary learned that God was going to do something extraordinary, but very difficult, what did she do? She went to spend time with her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she was close. Elizabeth encouraged her and helped her get ready for what lay ahead. I believe that Jesus's actions show that he also recognized the importance of encouragement to Mary. As he was dying on the cross, he asked his disciple John to take his place caring for Mary, and who better than John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, to care for the mother Jesus loved. The more difficult the circumstances, the more we need and benefit from the encouragement of others.

So be encouraged today, know for yourself these words from Jeremiah 29:11

***'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.'***

Are you willing to say yes to God? May God bless you as you ponder these words in your heart.  
Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Caring God, we bring to you our prayers for others and for ourselves knowing that where one or two are gathered you are here in our midst and will hear our prayers.

We pray today for those who feel far from themselves and others. We pray that this Advent season might, in the midst of demand, provide soft nights and ease, so that people can return to themselves, knowing you, too, are always in the heart, and always wait for us with kindness.

**We ask this, in the name of all that is good.**

We remember today all who have not given their consent, but whose lives and bodies and integrity are taken for granted. For them, we pray for justice, reparation and truth.

**We ask this, in the name of all that is good.**

Today we remember that God surprised us by coming among us through the 'Yes' of Mary. Let us always be open to the surprise of finding God in unexpected places where God can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

**We ask this, in the name of all that is good.**

Now let us join all our prayers together in the words of the prayer our Lord taught his disciples to say.

Traditional Form

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;**

Modern Form

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,**

thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass  
against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever  
Amen

your kingdom come;  
your will be done;  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin  
against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and  
the glory are yours, now and for ever.  
Amen.

**Hymn: 'Hills of the north rejoice' (StF:172)**

Charles Ernest Oakley (1832-1865)

1. Hills of the north, rejoice,  
river and mountain-spring,  
hark to the advent voice;  
valley and lowland, sing.  
Christ comes in righteousness and love,  
he brings salvation from above.
2. Isles of the southern seas,  
sing to the listening earth;  
carry on every breeze  
hope of a world's new birth;  
in Christ shall all be made anew;  
his word is sure, his promise true.
3. Lands of the east, arise!  
He is your brightest morn;  
greet him with joyous eyes,  
let praise his path adorn;  
your seers have longed to know their  
Lord;  
to you he comes, the final Word!
4. Shores of the utmost west,  
lands of the setting sun,  
welcome the heavenly guest  
in whom the dawn has come;  
he brings a never-ending light,  
who triumphed o'er our darkest night.
5. Shout, as you journey on;  
songs be in every mouth!  
Lo, from the north they come,  
from east and west and south;  
in Jesus all shall find their rest,  
in him the universe be blest.

**Blessing:** God of surprises, you chose Mary as the ark of your covenant with us; and with her 'Yes', you entered the world of humanity in body and blood. Nurtured by the presence of your Spirit, we go out, to listen for your voice, and to expect the ordinary, in your name to be extraordinary. **Amen.**

Please be assured that Rev'd Lesley and Rev'd Kim are available should you need us.

We can be contacted by calling 01933 312778 for Rev'd Lesley and 01933 622137 for Rev'd Kim

Words for the hymns are reproduced from Singing the Faith Music Edition. CCLI reproduced under licence No. 1905000